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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
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DEVELOPMENTS SINCE D-DAY IN BALKAN RESISTANCE AND COLLABORATION

resistance and collaboration

Description

An outline of the changes since 6 June in the relationships of the Balkan resistance movements with the Allied powers, and an analysis of developments within the movements themselves, together with a summary of the present status of collaborationist activity, and a brief statement on German policy.

1 August 1944

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DEVELOPMENTS SINCE D-DAY IN BALKAN RESISTANCE AND COLLABORATION

I. Resistance (Yugoslavia, Greece, Albania).

A. Yugoslavia

1. Early in June the German parachute attack on Partisan headquarters at Drvar forced Tito and the leaders of the Allied missions to leave the country and go to Bari. Tito almost immediately returned to the island of Vis, where, so far as is known, he has remained ever since, surrounded by a large British garrison. He feels, as his actions have shown, that he is operating in the shadow of the British. All developments within the Partisan movement since D-Day must be considered in the light of this situation.

2. Under British influence also, Premier Subasich went to Yugoslavia and held his initial talks with Tito. These resulted in the conclusion of a widely-publicized agreement and in the formation of a cabinet in which two Partisan representatives were to participate.

3. It is generally believed, both by Partisans and by American observers, that the British hope, by (a) merging the Partisan movement with a sympathetic government-in-exile and (b) inducing all Yugoslav resistance elements to join the Partisans, to submerge the strongly communist leadership of the present movement.

4. This apparent intention has aroused alarm among Tito's left-wing advisers. From the provinces Partisan delegates have brought evidence indicating that the people do not yet understand his dealing with the Royal Government. These two factors have led to an apparent cooling of his original enthusiasm for the coalition with Subasich. He now insists, for example, that the two Partisan members of the Subasich cabinet are not official representatives. This may be largely due to the fact that they have had to take the oath of allegiance to the King.

5. Moreover, after he had at first agreed to be present, Tito refused to attend a conference scheduled to be held at Caserta on 15 July with Subasich and the Supreme Allied Commander in the Middle East, General Wilson.

6. It is thought by some British circles that the advice of the Russian military mission may have had some part in Tito's decisions and in his growing suspicion of the British. There is no evidence to confirm this.

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7. The German attack did not, as was widely predicted, disrupt the operations of the Partisan movement; the operating forces of a large guerrilla organization are necessarily relatively independent of headquarters. Military operations appear to have continued about as usual, with some significant Partisan successes reported.

8. Within the Partisan movement itself, the outstanding development of the last six weeks has been the rapid progress of the campaign to win support in Serbia. An increasing number of reliable reports indicates that the Chetnik movement is growing steadily more and more demoralized. Local commanders continue to disobey Mihailovich's orders and otherwise to evince a high degree of individualism, while the defection of Djurich to the Partisans has caused confusion and doubt. To combat increasing desertions, Mihailovich has instituted a local system of secret police. His "National Committee," which we now know to have been composed of delegates appointed by him, and not elected by the Serbian people, has repudiated the Subasich government, and thus apparently lost its last chance to tie in with any group that might keep it alive.

9. Moreover, the Partisan leadership, probably acting to some extent on British advice, has appointed to leading positions in the newly established Serbian GHQ two other well known Serbs, in addition to General Popovich. These are Djurich himself, who may be a drawing card in winning over some Chetniks, and Col. Lozich, in 1941 Chief of Staff and Commander in Chief of the Yugoslav Army in the Middle East, and thereafter one of the leading figures in the establishment of the Yugoslav unit in the Red Army. Lozich has recently arrived in Yugoslavia from Moscow by way of Bari.

10. The news of the opening of the Western Front has spurred Partisan recruiting considerably.

11. Immediately before liberation, the Partisans are likely to continue harassing any German withdrawal. After liberation they may be expected to oppose any attempt to return King Peter to the country prior to a plebiscite. They will probably display increasing suspicion of Britain together with increasing affection for Russia. It is possible that the new American mission may have some effect in mitigating this last development, but this is not likely.

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B. Greece

1. For the past six weeks attention has been focussed on the increasingly deteriorating relations between the Cairo government and the left wing guerrilla groups in Greece (EAM-ELAS, the PEEA, and the Communist Party). In spite of pleas by certain of the moderate left wing delegates who had participated in the Lebanon Conference that negotiations not be shut off, Papandreaou and his British advisers insisted upon the return to Greece of all these delegates.

2. The death sentences passed (but not yet carried out) upon those charged with mutiny in the Greek armed forces are another indication that the present Cairo government is making no serious attempt to keep open the possibility of a compromise with the left wingers.

3. This situation has led to a British decision to withdraw all their liaison officers from Greek territory; American officers are staying.

4. The dramatic and unexpected arrival in Greece on 26 July of a portion of the Russian military mission to Tito, apparently charged with the task of persuading the left wing bloc to collaborate with Cairo, may have altered the whole situation. It now appears that unity may be achieved. But from the British point of view the fact that it will have been achieved under Russian auspices will probably be less desirable than failure to achieve it.

5. From within Greece there have come an increasing number of reports tending to show the utter war-weariness of the population. The old-line politicians still regard the EAM as the vanguard of the Communist menace, and tend to give their support to the German-sponsored quisling Security Battalions. Internal dissension among groups of Greeks all normally more or less democratic in outlook is extreme, and is constantly fostered by the Germans.

6. A reliable observer reports that those in charge of the EAM are now sure that they will shortly be rid of the Germans in any case. They therefore feel that it is now necessary to husband their forces in an attempt to avoid the return of the King and of British domination, and to insure their own supremacy in post-war Greece.

7. The future behavior of the resistance groups, and therefore, to a great extent the future of Greece, would appear to depend upon the degree of influence which the new Russian mission proves able to exercise; and the direction in which they have been ordered to exercise it. If they want only to insure Greek unity for the period of the war, and then propose to leave to the British the pacification and rehabilitation of Greece, present British resentment at their interference is likely to evaporate, and the situation in Greece may be stabilized. If, on the other hand, their present gesture is the opening move in a campaign to wrest from the British political control of Greece, its implication for the future of Greece, as well as for the future of Europe, may prove grave: the British are unlikely to let Greece go without a struggle; Greece may turn out to be the area in which the United States may first have to intervene in an attempt to reconcile the conflicts of interest between its Allies.

C. Albania

1. Over the past six weeks the left wing LNC has demonstrated far more strength both in the military and political field than had been anticipated. Following the pattern of Tito and the EAM, it has established a "provisional government," with a large percentage of communists in high posts. It has reorganized its army, established connections with the tribesmen in the north, where it had previously been weakest, and put on a sustained military advance northward.

2. The Allies, meanwhile, have been trying to secure the promise of Abas Kupi, Zogist leader and rival of the LNC, to collaborate with the left wing group against the Germans, and thus to avoid a civil war which otherwise the LNC was determined to precipitate. Both sides have now consented to send representatives to Bari; and the flow of Allied supplies to the LNC, which had been cut off temporarily for fear they would be used against other Albanians, may shortly be resumed.

3. The opposition of the LNC to the return of King Zog is increasingly manifest.

II. Collaboration (Satellite countries and quisling regimes).

A. Rumania

1. The long lull on the Eastern Front would seem to have provided an excellent opportunity for the Rumanian "opposition" to stage its overthrow of the Antonescu regime if it was ever going to do so. But there is no evidence whatever that this action will take place before a Russian drive deep into Rumanian territory, if at all.

2. As has previously been indicated, the attitude of the opposition towards questions of future Rumanian sovereignty, territory, and governmental structure is much the same as that of the Antonescu regime. Negotiations in Cairo with Maniu's representative, Stirbey, have dragged along, and have now been suspended by the Allies until the Rumanian opposition takes some action. Stirbey and the spokesmen for the regime evince the same unconquerable fear of Russia; and reveal the continued hope that the United States and Britain may be separated from the USSR, and persuaded to deal separately with the Rumanians, or at least to protect the Rumanians against Russian occupation.

3. The population continues relatively apathetic, although possibly more determined than before to continue in the German alliance as a result of civilian deaths from airraids.

B. Bulgaria

1. Unlike Rumania, Bulgaria has been responding sensitively to the Russian advances in the north. The Bagrianov government has apparently made every effort to avoid a break in relations with the USSR, to whom many Bulgarians still look for protection against the assumed intention of the Western Allies to deprive the Bulgarians of former Greek and Yugoslav territory.

2. The government is making every effort to get out of the war under the most favorable possible conditions: it has tightened economic controls and apparently dealt successfully with the problem of the guerrillas. It has been able to persuade the Germans to reduce military traffic across the country, and to withdraw from Black Sea ports; and has aided Russian agents in checking this behavior. It has also taken steps to modify harsh treatment of Jews, and is reported to have ordered Bulgarian anti-aircraft units not to fire upon American planes except in defense of Bulgarian territory.

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3. Before a separate peace can be granted to Bulgaria on the basis of such behavior, however, relations with Germany will have to be formally severed.

C. Quisling Groups

There is no evidence that any of the four chief Balkan quisling regimes have made any attempt to desert or sell out the Germans.

1. Pavelich Croatia. All news from Croatia reveals disorganization and deterioration of control. Those areas not occupied by the Partisans are held by the Germans, and, except for the Demobrantsi, whose disposition remains a question, there will be no problem in dealing with the vestiges of the Pavelich government.

2. Nedich Serbia. While there is nothing to indicate that the Nedich control of Belgrade and environs has grown any less, it seems likely that the new few weeks will see a rapid deterioration of the collaborationists' position in Serbia, as a corollary to the successful Partisan drive reported above. Nedich propaganda tends to be more and more royalist in tone, and to lament the continued presence of Peter as a prisoner in the hands of the British, who have even forced him to appoint a Croat to the premiership.

3. The Greek quisling regime. Dissension among the opposition movements has led to a strengthening in the Greek quisling regime, whose Security Battalions have proved effective in doing the Germans' work for them. No popular support, however, can be said to exist for the regime as such, and it is likely that it will disintegrate shortly upon German withdrawal.

4. The Albanian puppet regime. During the past six weeks a completely new cabinet has been formed, and one of the remaining three of the original four regents has resigned. The regime's authority is limited almost entirely to the city of Tirana and environs, while the Germans appear to dispose of its collaborationist troops, mostly recruited from the Kossovo region.

III. German Policy

Except for some possible indications of weakness in Bulgaria, German policy has not apparently altered in any of the Balkan countries. A withdrawal from Greece is considered probable, but unless the Russian break-through in Poland carries all the way to Germany proper, it is expected that the Germans can continue to fight in Rumania, and may well defend the rest of the peninsula.